



A Better Way Foundation is a Connecticut non-profit organization that is dedicated to a sensible shift in drug policy from one of incarceration to substance abuse treatment and public health.

Sara Ferah - Clean Slate Committee Member Testimony
Judiciary Committee

Raised SB 641: An Act Concerning Repeat Violent Offenders (oppose)
Raised HB 5876 An Act Concerning Mandatory Life Sentences for Repeat Violent Offenders (oppose)
Raised HB 5915 An Act Concerning Persistent Dangerous Felony Offenders (oppose)
HB 5035 An Act Concerning Repeat Violent Offenders, Burglary and Pardons and Parole (oppose)

My friend was sexually assaulted. Another friend of mine is a victim of domestic violence.

I am here today to oppose all of the persistent offender laws. Because my friend was raped in prison! Because I currently know two, totally unrelated, victims of domestic violence who are now in prison!

These proposed persistent offender laws are not feel-good legislation with no real consequences. This is feel-bad legislation with very real consequences. If passed, these laws will hurt victims of rape and domestic violence worst of all. These laws will hurt the children of rape victims and domestic violence first. It is only second that these laws will do nothing.

In 1999 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published a study concluding that the rates of rape had remained steady over the previous 15 years¹. During this same time, California and Washington had passed three-strikes laws. Other states passed mandatory minimums. But, these laws actually get in the way of what can really make a difference.

Over the last five years, women seeking help with the trials and traumas of domestic violence has increased from 41,000 per year to 53,000 per year². And these harsher laws only interfere with helping these families. Children say that they want the abuse to stop, but they don't want their parents to go to prison. Children want their abusers to get counseling, but if they ask for help they lose their parents.

And too many women know that this is the risk of asking for help. Way too many women are as scared to ask for help as they are scared of their abusers. Dual arrests for domestic violence was 25% in CT, in 2007³.

Instead of persistent offender laws that increase rape and domestic violence, we need programs that promote real change. Support the Healthy Teens act, which provides funding to teach youth about healthy relationships. Create bills based on Restorative Justice models which focus on empowering victims and healing communities and offenders.

Recently I met a woman who spent ten years in prison because, after years of domestic violence, she killed her abuser.

There are so many obstacles put in the way of women who seek help for domestic violence. Usually the abuse just gets worse and worse until the abuser starts to threaten her children also, and this is when victims have little choice, but to take extreme actions. Each year in CT, about 25 women and children die from domestic violence⁴.

Women and children die because of these laws! People are raped because of these laws!
Please! - Stop building prisons and start offering real help.

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¹ Taken from the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault Manual, 2002

² According to the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

³ According to the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

⁴ According to the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence